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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PRAGUE 000106

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/05/2017

TAGS: [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [EZ](#)

SUBJECT: CZECH OPPOSITION LEADER PROMISES FLEXIBILITY IN  
APPROACH TO MISSILE DEFENSE

REF: PRAGUE 102

Classified By: Ambassador Richard Graber for reasons 1.4 b+d

¶1. (C) Summary: Czech opposition leader Jiri Paroubek told Ambassador that he would ensure that his party continued to maintain a flexible approach on a missile defense (MD) radar in the Czech Republic. Paroubek confirmed that he felt that for internal party reasons he had no choice but to have his Social Democratic party (CSSD) come out with a negative opinion on MD (reftel), but accepted Ambassador's arguments that it made no sense for the party to take a final position on MD before the results of negotiations are known, nor to take a position that was contrary to the long-term security interests of the country. Paroubek told Ambassador, and stressed strongly in public remarks following the meeting, that it is important to CSSD that the U.S. MD effort in Europe be seen to have a "multilateral" component. Paroubek said that after his party's Executive Committee meets this weekend and adopts what will certainly be a negative position on MD (and in favor of a referendum), he will aim to "freeze" the debate on MD within the party, and reopen it only once negotiations are complete. End summary.

¶2. (C) CSSD Chairman Paroubek readily agreed to Ambassador's request for a meeting, made after news broke that the CSSD leadership met early on February 2 and for the first time took an official stance against MD. Paroubek, who over the weekend completed a clean sweep of regional CSSD conferences to become the sole candidate for CSSD Chairman when the national party Congress takes place next month, welcomed Ambassador to his office on February 5 with confidence and good cheer, saying that he would have asked to meet the Ambassador if our call had not come first. This was the third meeting between the two in less than one month. Paroubek was accompanied by CSSD Foreign Policy Advisor Ivan Busniak. Of note: CSSD Shadow Foreign Minister Lubomir Zaoralek, a harsh critic of MD, did not participate in this meeting (Ambassador has a separate meeting with Zaoralek scheduled for February 12).

¶3. (C) Ambassador noted his disappointment at the change in Paroubek's position on MD, and urged Paroubek to maintain flexibility in determining the party's stance. He emphasized that it made no sense for CSSD to take a position today opposed to MD since (a) negotiations on the facility have not even begun, and (b) this is a decision with long-term security consequences for the Czech Republic, for Europe, and for the United States.

¶4. (C) Reading from prepared notes, Paroubek said he wanted to explain next steps within the party on MD. He did not dwell on any of the reasons why CSSD was taking a stand against MD, nor did he waste any time trying to make the case that there had not been a shift in CSSD's position. Rather, true to his pragmatic style, Paroubek focused on the road

ahead, starting out by saying that the issue "is not closed" within the party. Paroubek admitted that there would be further debate this week, culminating with the CSSD Executive Committee (UVV) meeting on Saturday. He said he wants to have a decision at the weekend meeting that is "as moderate as possible" and which would effectively close the debate within the party for now. He expects that within 9-12 months, when negotiations are complete and all the facts are on the table, the debate can be joined again.

¶5. (C) Emphasizing that he was speaking candidly with the Ambassador, Paroubek said that he needed to neutralize the MD debate in advance of the CSSD Congress (March 23-24 in Brno).

He said his presence at the regional party conferences in recent weeks demonstrated to him that some 80% of CSSD members, and perhaps 50% of likely CSSD voters, are opposed to the radar. He went on to place some of the blame for these numbers on the ruling ODS party, claiming that the Topolánek government's openness in discussing the U.S. proposal, including identifying the site, had accelerated the public debate and forced mayors near the site (most of whom are CSSD or Communist) to begin vocalizing their concerns.

¶6. (C) Looking ahead, Paroubek stated repeatedly that the most important factor in determining a future CSSD position on MD is the multilateral element -- defining the connection between the U.S. MD system and NATO. He emphasized that he would make sure that CSSD's position going forward remained "flexible" and boasted of his ability to "manipulate" the working of the party when necessary. Paroubek emphasized that he has few allies within the party on MD. He promised that CSSD aimed to keep their approach to MD "moderate"-- contrasting this with both the Communists and ODS whom he said had too often "exaggerated" (without elaborating). He

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encouraged the embassy to continue to meet with individual CSSD officials to discuss the matter with them, and expressed appreciation for embassy participation in a recent webchat with party members devoted to MD.

¶7. (SBU) Paroubek and the Ambassador participated in a press conference following the meeting -- one that had obviously been prepared by CSSD but not previously discussed with the embassy. For the press, Paroubek emphasized CSSD's transatlantic focus and existing good relations with the U.S.; made a division between the first stage of the party's debate on MD, which would close with this weekend's Executive Committee meeting, and any future debate once negotiations concluded; and stressed the importance of a multilateral component as the key to a revised CSSD position on the MD project. Ambassador emphasized the importance of looking at MD in terms of long-term security, and also avoiding a final decision before negotiations had even begun. Questions from the press focused on whether there would be a referendum (this topic did not come up during the private meeting; Paroubek made positive noises, but did not dwell on the issue), whether there exists a NATO element to the current U.S. offer (Ambassador noted that NATO had identified a missile threat and was studying a response, and that the U.S. system could perhaps be compatible with a future NATO national MD system), and whether the USG was worried by the Czech voices critical of MD (Ambassador emphasized our long and close partnership with the CR on security issues).  
GRABER